YOUR KINDNESS CLUB LETTER

FEBRUARY -- AND ST. VALENTINE’S DAY -- WE DEDICATE TO THE BEAVERS

May they never be trapped anymore.
Dear friends,

Near a town named Wilderness, only about 200 miles from Kindness Club Headquarters, is a large, undeveloped tract of land where a colony of beavers live. They have built a dam on Greenway Creek, creating a pond that is just the way they want it, built a beaver lodge in the pond, and seem quite happy with their home. As far as they are concerned they have clear title to the land.

If beaver folklore were told by the older beavers to the young kits, or if a beaver family history were kept, young beavers at Wilderness would learn their ancestors didn't always live at Wilderness, Virginia. They may, in fact, have come from Canada, or some more wilderness state such as Wisconsin or Michigan, farther north. There had been such extensive trapping of beavers sixty years ago for their fur, that, by 1919 every beaver in the State of Virginia had been killed. Then, in 1936, the Virginia Fish and Game Department began to realize beaver pelts used to be a good source of income in the state. So they began buying beavers that had been live-trapped, importing them in from other states, and releasing them in areas that were just right for beavers. They kept releasing beavers until 1948, and by then there were beavers in over half the counties in the state. When the Fish and Game Department felt there was a sizeable enough population of beavers, they announced a trapping season on beavers. Now trappers may trap beavers all during January and through half of February. Another species of animal has been 'protected' so it can be killed by trappers for fun or profit, or perhaps for both.

But the beavers at Wilderness don't own the land they live on. It is owned by American Central Corporation, a land developer who plans to subdivide the land and sell parcels of land to people who want to build homes for themselves. To subdivide the land, the company must first build some roads to get to the new home sites. Where the road goes across Greenway Creek, they have installed culverts so the water in the creek can pass safely through to the other side of the road. Beavers don't understand culverts or road bridges over streams. To them the culverts look like a break in someone's dam, which could do a lot of damage, if not repaired. So the beavers, thinking they are helping the developer, work all night, stuffing sticks and mud and debris into the culverts. By morning they have effectively stopped all the 'leaks' in the 'dam', and, satisfied with their work, they return to their lodges to get a good day's sleep. Perhaps they dream of the nice, new pond that will be created when enough water from Greenway Creek comes down to be trapped in the dam the men built, which they helped to repair.

Every morning workmen arrive to find their new culverts for the creek dammed up with sticks and mud and debris. Every morning they have to clean out the culverts of the materials the beavers built into them during the night. If they didn't the creek would soon fill the pond there, and then would overflow the road. Workmen have asked the developer to live-trap the beavers and move them somewhere else. But the developer doesn't want to lose the beavers on his property, because he thinks it would be more desirable to live in a neighborhood where you could go down to the pond and watch beavers at work. The developer only wants to get the beavers to move just a little way upstream, and, of course, stop plugging up the culverts.

Beavers are very intelligent and they have begun to understand that the developer wants the creek water to flow through the culverts. It still upsets them, I'm sure, to see all that good water go to waste. But they have begun to move upstream a little, out of the way of the road construction. They will not be disturbed but can be protected and appreciated by the people who build their homes nearby.

When it first appeared the beavers might be destroyed, The Kindness Club received a call from Beaver Defenders, asking us to help. We asked Sue Pressman, from the Humane Society, to contact the developer. When we learned the developer really wants to protect the beavers, we offered to help him in any way we could.

We think this developer has the right idea, in offering home sites with the provision that the animals who live there should not be disturbed, but should be protected and appreciated. Wouldn't you like to live where you could walk down to the pond and watch the beavers? Perhaps some day a new community near Wilderness, Virginia will become a model for living in close harmony with nature and free animals, and, when home sites are developed in other areas, they will be patterned after this plan.

Your friend,
A special committee has now been appointed to make recommendations to the government agencies that are responsible for the protection of mustangs. Wild Horse Annie has been appointed to this committee. We’re very pleased, because we know she will do everything possible to be sure the wild horses and burros are properly protected. The committee had its first meeting January 12 and 13. See your December newsletter for more on Wild Horse Annie.

In 1941 there were only 15 whooping cranes known to exist anywhere in the world. Since that time people have been trying to protect them and help them grow in numbers so they would not become extinct. Whooping cranes spend their summers at their breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada. They fly south every year to spend their winters at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, in Texas.

With the protection we have been able to offer them, and with the efforts that were made to raise some in captivity, there are now 72 whooping cranes living today. 21 of these are in captivity, and 51 live free. Wildlife experts expected there would be more this year, but cannot locate 13 birds. They believe these are year-old birds who do not always stay as close to the flock as the others. Because of this, there may still be some hope that they are safe, and just living somewhere else. Efforts will continue for the protection of whooping cranes, since 72 birds is still too few to be sure they wouldn’t become extinct if some disaster struck.

Many other animals are threatened today with becoming extinct. What a wonderful thing it would be if all these animals could be saved as successfully as we have saved the whooping cranes so far.

Although the President banned the use of poisons for killing coyotes, the National Wool Growers Association is pressuring him to lift the ban. They claim coyotes kill sheep, and they want the coyotes destroyed. They are holding their annual meeting in the nation's capitol so members can visit their congressmen and other public officials to try to convince them the President's ban should be removed.

You can help protect coyotes by writing to President Nixon and to your congressmen. Thank the President for banning the use of poisons, and ask him to make it permanent. Tell your congressman how happy you are that the President banned the use of poisons, and ask him to back up the President by getting Congress to pass a law that would ban poisons permanently. Your letters now may save many coyotes in the future.

President Richard M. Nixon
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Get your Congressman's address from your public library.

Who Is This?

It's your turn to guess who this long slinky creature is. See if you can be the first one to guess accurately his common, and his scientific names. Look him up in your local library and send as much information as you have learned about him to KIND headquarters. The best reply will be printed in your newsletter. Clue: Although he has two cousins living here, he is not a native American himself.
"All beavers work.... All beavers are good conservationists.... All beavers are community-minded.... Beavers are friendly, industrious, good home builders, good mates and good parents. Many people are none of these things. And yet it is lawful to trap beavers, who do the world nothing but good. How confused can mankind become?" - Sterling North, for The Beaver Defenders

The industrious beaver

The story is told that a colony of young beavers were attempting to build a particularly difficult dam. They tried and tried, but couldn't get the dam to hold. Finally an old and experienced dam building beaver came over and helped them construct their dam and engineer it in such a marvelous fashion that it stood for many years.

Whether or not that story is true, we don't know. But we do know beavers possess an engineering intelligence that indicates they understand the strains great volumes of swift water can put on a dam. If the current is especially swift beavers will build their dams in a curved shape, so the water in the center of the stream is pushing against a curved dam. They will build a straight dam on a stream that doesn't have such fast currents, because such a dam is easier to build and will be strong enough to do the job properly.

People used to think beavers could control the way a tree fell by the way they gnawed on it, with their sharp teeth. This isn't true, and one recent report told about a beaver whose tail got caught under a tree he had cut down. Fortunately someone found him and lifted the tree off his tail. Beavers do build canals, though. If there aren't enough trees near the water for building their dams or for food for winter, they build canals from the trees they want to cut down to the stream where they want to use the trees. They float the felled trees down their canals.

The intelligence of the beaver is also seen in the way his lodge is constructed. There is never a draft in a beaver house, because both entrances are under water. Every beaver house has a main family room, where the family eats and above it is the bedroom, which is also the nursery when beaver kits are born. Beavers store their food under water and lay up enough food to last all winter. They bring food into the house only as it is needed, and never have to brave the winter ice and snow all winter long, but stay cozy and warm in their well-made lodge.

Even though beavers were once exterminated in many states, efforts to introduce them again have been quite successful. The European beaver has not fared as well, and is only found in a few places. The pressure of civilization seems to have caused him to forget many of his engineering skills, and beavers there usually live in hollowed out banks of streams. Recently some of them have begun to try to build lodges again in an area where they are protected and not disturbed. Perhaps they will someday build dams, too, if enough of them are given adequate protection. This indicates that beavers, in addition to being highly intelligent construction engineers, are probably also extremely sensitive creatures. Let us hope we can protect our beavers sufficiently so they never forget their art of building lodges and dams. Let us hope, too, that we can each become the kind of trusted friend that we would have to be, if the opportunity ever appeared for us to befriend one of the most helpful animals on Earth, the noble beaver.
PROTECT EASTER ANIMALS

You can protect baby animals from suffering when they are sold at Easter. Visit stores that might sell such animals. Ask them to agree not to sell them because of the suffering so many would endure when people don't know how to care for them properly. Keep a list, order posters (12 for 25¢), and distribute posters to stores that agree not to sell live baby animals at Easter. You must visit stores early, before they order the animals.

By Phyllis Gravel, N. Grosvenordale, Ct.

Your Kindness Club Letter is published monthly for members ages 6-10 by KIND, youth membership division of The Humane Society of the U.S.
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This is recycled paper.